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Daily Reflection from the Bishop

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The Commemoration of Alexander Crummell
10 September 2020

*Stay Home. Stop the Spread. Save Lives.
If you have to go out, wear a mask.
Your mask is not a chin guard.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

There are many criticisms of the book *Holy Women, Holy Men* and its successor volume, *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*, not the least of which is the vast growth in the number of commemorations in our calendar in recent years. But beyond the criticisms is the simple fact that our calendar contains a rich variety of commemorations that witness to the diversity of our common life and heritage, and that is a gift. We have two of these commemorations this week: Alexander Crummell today and Harry Burleigh tomorrow.

Crummell's story is one of the chapters of our life as a Church that our current calls for the re-learning of our history should put at the top of the list. It shows clearly and painfully how deeply ingrained in the life of the Church racism was in the 19th century, not just in the south, but also in the north, and in cities like Philadelphia and New York. It shows the firm resolve of Crummell and others in the face of injustice. It shows imagination and foresight, and a willingness to suffer the most dreadful consequences in the struggle for equality. And it shows how profoundly we are connected to this history, even if the rivers of the evidence have sometimes flowed underground and been unnoticed by so many of us.

Throughout most of my life as a parish priest, I lived in and served communities where there was the Daily Office and a daily Eucharist. There is no better way to allow the rich diversity of the heritage of our holy women and holy men (let alone the great feasts of the Church) to begin to become a living part of our common life than to anchor this diversity in prayer and praise each day. The faithful living of our calendar of commemorations is meant to shape and form us, and provoke us not just to know our sacred history, but to embody it. When we *pray* our sacred history in this way, as well as learn it, the witness of those who have gone before us lives again in us, and there is a chance that we shall know a new wholeness and integrity as we re-commit ourselves to carrying on their work. Our forebears pray for us, just as we pray for them.

We remember many things about Crummell's work and extraordinarily wide range of activity, but among them today I am thankful for two things especially. Among Crummell's many commitments was his conviction that, in addition to other important skills, training, and professions, the areas of art and culture are crucial in the advancement of black equality, and he was a great encourager of young black artists, writers, historians, and cultural experts. The fruits of this have been obvious for over a century now, and have greatly enriched us both in the Church and in our wider society.

And the second aspect of his work that I remember today is the founding of the Conference of Church Workers among Colored People. When there was the attempt by Southern bishops in the 1880s to create a segregated missionary district in the Church for black congregations, Crummell formed the Conference of Church Workers among Colored People (CCWACP) to oppose it. As Harold Lewis observes in his book, *Yet with a Steady Beat*, while this particular move was blocked, the spirit of such segregation persisted in pernicious ways in the life of the Church. In the establishment of CCWACP were sown the seeds of what became, almost a century later, first the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (the UBCL), and then the Union of Black Episcopalians.

Day in and day out, in season and out of season, our calendar will teach us a good bit of our history if we will put ourselves in the way of it. This is the formation that will change not just our behaviour, but our hearts and wills, for our beloved dead are alive in the Lord, and they still speak.

*Almighty and everlasting God,
we thank you for your servant Alexander Crummell,*

*whom you called to preach the Gospel
to those who were far off and to those who were near.
Raise up in this and every land evangelists
and heralds of your kingdom,
that your Church may proclaim
the unsearchable riches of our Savior Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

With love and prayers,

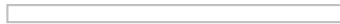
+ *Peter*

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